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Informant charges drug lords armed both sides in Nicaragua

By Michael Hedges
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Drug dealers provided guns to Nicaragua's ruling Sandinista government and to the resistance forces battling that regime, according to a former FBI informant known as "Wanda Doe."

The woman, who was sought by Sen. John Kerry to testify secretly before a Senate committee last fall, said she was told of the gunrunning by Jorge Ochoa, a Colombia drug kingpin, documents obtained by The Washington Times show.

Ms. Doe is quoted as saying Mr. Ochoa, boss of the Medellin drug cartel, told her he was "playing both sides of the water" because he wasn't sure who would end up controlling Nicaragua.

She said Mr. Ochoa, described by federal law enforcement officials as the leader of the cartel providing as much as 80 percent of the cocaine entering the United States, told her his "family provides guns to the Sandinistas and guns to the Contras which they obtain from the United States."

Ms. Doe's credibility has been questioned by federal

officials, who are concerned about discrepancies in her story that arose after she was contacted by members of Mr. Kerry's staff.

The FBI had cultivated Ms. Doe as a witness before she came to the attention of Mr. Kerry's staff. She had made a long list of intriguing claims and had been given a lie detector test by federal officials in Miami.

"Her polygraph was inconclusive, but what it boiled down to was we did believe some of what she said," a federal official said in a recent interview.

Sources said it was too early to assess her information, but the FBI "believed she had some good stuff that should be checked out."

Ms. Doe initially told federal of-

ficials in Florida that one of Miami's alleged drug bosses moved his laboratories to Cuba in 1986. She said she had detailed knowledge of the locations of the cocaine laboratories, which she said were set up by Mono Avella, described in the document as "one of the biggest suppliers of cocaine in Miami."

But after Ms. Doe began talking to Mr. Kerry's staff in Massachusetts, where she was taken from south Florida, her story became more elaborate, federal officials said.

Her claims are contained in an Oct. 6 statement Mr. Kerry's staff prepared to seek immunity from the Justice Department for her.

At about the same time, according to Justice Department memos, Ms. Doe stopped cooperating with the FBI.

The Foreign Relations Committee last week hired Jack Blum, Mr. Kerry's former chief investigator, to conduct a probe into drug and gun smuggling in Miami and Central America.

Mr. Blum last year told the committee he had solid evidence of drug and gun dealing by the Sandinistas and Cubans, as well as the resistance forces fighting Nicaragua's Marxist Sandinista regime.

A committee spokesman earlier this week said he could not comment on who would be called to testify before the panel.

But last fall, Mr. Kerry was anxious to have Ms. Doe as a witness.

Jonathan Winer, a staff attorney for the senator, wrote in the Oct. 6 statement that she "is willing to take a polygraph regarding any information she provides to the Justice Department upon a grant of immunity."

According to sources on the committee, Mr. Kerry hoped to use the statement to convince the Justice Department not to challenge immunity for Ms. Doe. The committee then would have applied for immunity through federal court. But time ran out on last year's Senate session.

The statement on Ms. Doe prepared by Mr. Winer describes a far-reaching network of drug and gun trafficking in the Caribbean, oiled by huge bribes to air traffic controllers, Customs officials, Immigration Services agents, judges and CIA operatives who are named in the document.

She is quoted naming several public officials who she claimed were being bribed by drug dealers. Among these charges, she claimed to have witnessed a U.S. District Court judge in Miami and his clerk stuff a \$1.25 million bribe in two diaper boxes, and subsequently give a major drug trafficker a "very light sentence in a minimum security prison."

She also was the source of widely reported allegations of flights to the Contras from the Barranquilla, Columbia, airport that she said were conducted by Southern Airways, a former CIA airline, according to the statement.

In the statement, Mr. Winer wrote, "Wanda Doe has said she is willing to testify in a closed hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about her knowledge of the narcotics business and of official U.S. and foreign corruption related to the narcotics traffic, if she is granted immunity."

A law enforcement source in South Florida said officials there have begun to "look into" some of the Doe allegations.

"She has been dropped here," said a federal law official in Miami.